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THE
DIVINE ORIGIN
OF
POETRY

ASSERTED AND PROVED:

THE
ABUSE OF IT REPROVED;
AND
POETASTERS THREATENED.

To which is added,

A MEDITATION ON MAY;

OR, THE

Brief History of a modern POET.

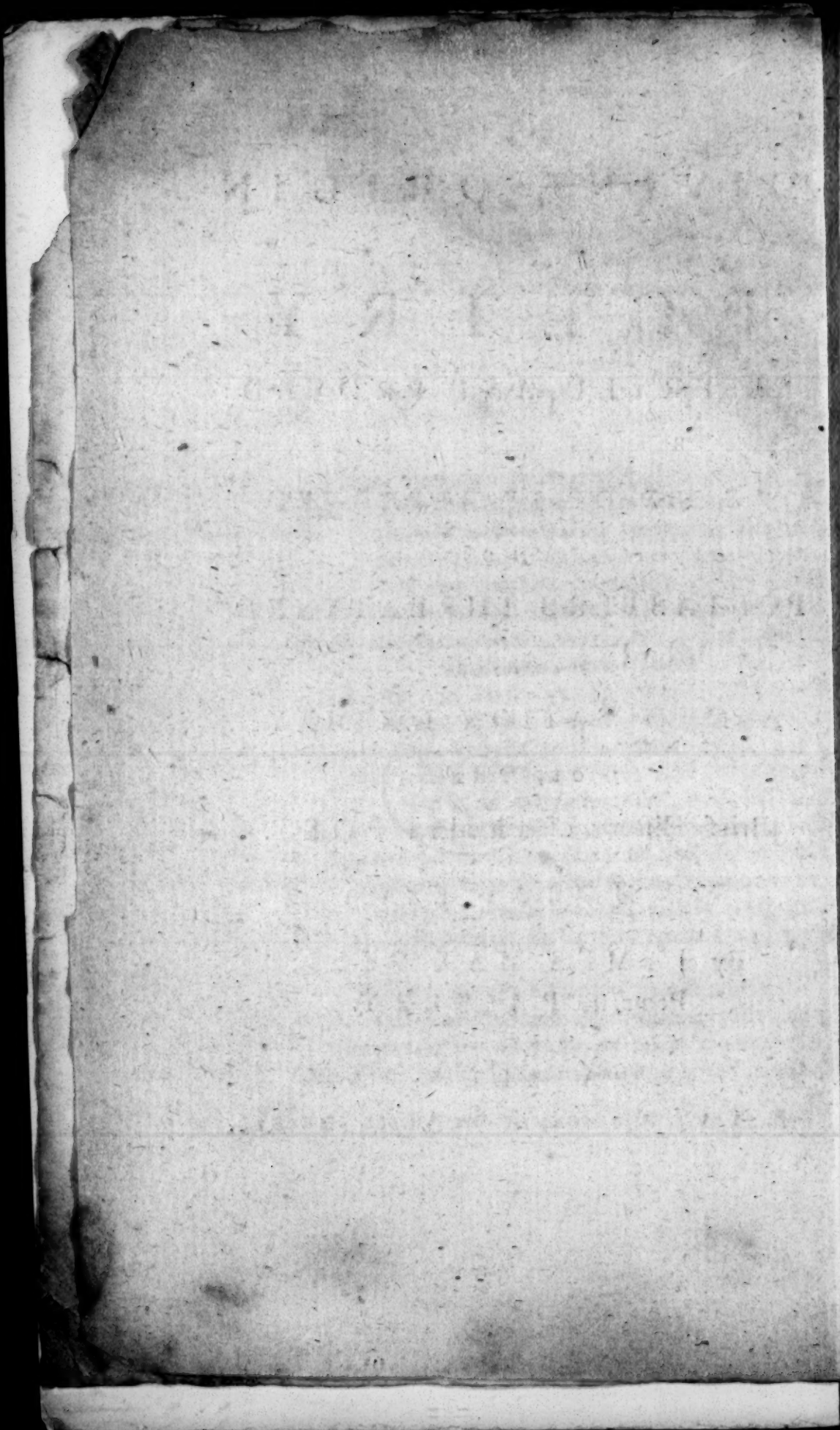
TWO MORAL ESSAYS.

By JAMES MAXWELL,

POET in PAISLEY. 7

PAISLEY:

Printed by J. NEILSON, for the Author. MDCCXC.



THE
DIVINE ORIGIN
OF
POETRY, &c.

O Heavenly Muse, thine influence impart,
To rouse my genius and inflame my heart !
Let energy appear with pow'r sublime,
And sweetest harmony in flowing rhyme.
Since poetry derives alone from heav'n,
Such as was to our pristine fathers giv'n.
Those ancient Sires, long, long before the flood,
The gift of Poetry well understood ;
Ere books or writings any where were found,
They taught their offspring by the verbal sound ;
That so their maxims they might long retain,
The sounds and numbers proved not in vain ;
But fixt upon their memories of old,
The wholesome precepts which their fathers told.
Thus were they handed down from age to age,
Ere they could either write or read one page.
This great defect the Lord himself supplied,
That so his name might still be glorified.

And thus he left mankind without excuse,
When they presum'd his precepts to refuse.
Thousands of years had they no written word,
To teach them how they ought to serve the Lord.

Yet were they never left without a light,
 To understand his holy will aright.
 Till Moses' time, when men were multiplied,
 Then writings did the Lord for them provide.
 And ever since have books been more and more,
 Diffusing learning far from shore to shore.

Now Moses was a Poet most sublime,
 Much Poetry he wrote; of blank or rhyme
 No matter which; it surely was divine,
 And will for ever with bright lustre shine.
 Then is it not a most enormous crime,
 To prostitute the Muse in prose or rhyme?
 To make her speak a language that's profane,
 Or any thing in a lascivious strain?
 The greatest sacrilege this sure must be,
 And aggravated to the last degree.
 This ought to be by all mankind abhor'd,
 Who are true subjects to our rightful Lord.
 Most daring sure, to take the gifts of Heav'n,
 Which were to men for God's own glory giv'n,
 To make them instruments for use of hell,
 To teach mankind against him to rebel.
 Their heinous guilt is of the deepest dye,
 That can be offer'd to the Lord Most High:
 Which if not cancel'd ere their breath expire
 Their portion must be everlasting fire.
 Their crime is taking things that are divine,
 And casting them before the dogs or swine.

Nor only such as write and publish these
 Vile trumpery, the carnal mind to please;
 But all who purchase such audacious things,
 Are open rebels to the King of kings.

Their

Their guilt will not be found a whit the less
 Than those who dare such noxious things express.
 Nay these perhaps may deemed be the chief,
 As the receiver's blacker than the thief.
 They take the things they had in trust from God,
 Which for his glory were to be bestow'd,
 To raise rebellious arms against his throne,
 What more enormous crime was ever known?
 O with what trembling! with what gloomy fear,
 Must they before his judgment seat appear!
 Prepost'rous wretches! ah, how will they stand,
 With dire despair! assign'd to his left hand!
 And with what horror! with what trembling heart,
 Hear their dire sentence, "Hence from me depart,
 With devils go eternally and dwell,
 Amidst the black infernal lake of hell!
 Prepar'd for Satan and his cursed crew,
 This is the portion that remains for you!
 Who have embezzel'd what you had in trust,
 To gratify the flesh and please your lust.
 Thus have you wasted all my trusted store,
 Which was to aid my cause, and feed my poor."

Thus all base scribblers, who with hellish wit,
 Have things profane, or things lascivious writ;
 And those who them encouragement have giv'n,
 To raise rebellion 'gainst the Pow'rs of Heav'n
 Let such consider this their certain doom,
 Who wealth and wit on wickedness consume.
 Yea, let such wanton wits, of hellish flame,
 Who glory only in their open shame,
 Consider this their dire destructive end,
 While they the great Almighty God offend.
 Now they may laugh and please themselves betimes
 And their companions, with audacious rhymes,

Until

Their

Until they plunge together down to hell,
Where they for ever must with devils dwell.

This friendly warning they may ridicule,
And call the author but a crazy fool.
Well, be it so, if you be truly wise,
And count the truths of God but flatt'ring lies;
'This is no doubt what some of you believe,
And credit freely to the devil give.
Well, you may take his counsel; trust his lies,
And all reveal'd religion now despise:
And think, when you resign your mortal breath,
'There will be no more reck'ning after death *.
But tho' this age is now so wicked grown,
That few, too few against such jargon frown;
But give encouragement to such gross lies,
While those who write the truth they quite despise.

Yet time will come, perhaps 'tis not far off,
When you, who now at all religion scoff,
Shall weep and howl; by God and men abhor'd,
And none will think you worth one flatt'ring word;
Or if your names should be at all exprest,
'Twill be with detestation, not in jest:
Like Cain and Judas, and such noxious names,
Against whom all the race of man exclaims,
Or Pontius Pilate, in th' Apostle's creed,
Which is a mark of infamy indeed.

Such shall the fate of Poetafters be,
Who but pretend to mimic Poetry:
And other scribblers too, of verse and prose,
Who filthy jargon to the world expose.

Such

* See R. Burns pretended paraphrase on the xcth Psalm.

Such four the taste of judges who are sage,
And are a scandal to the present age.
Especially the smutty and profane,
These are the objects of all just disdain.

The gift of Poetry is all divine,
And shall with honour everlasting shine :
But Poetasters all that art disgrace,
And are a most profane obnoxious race.
Yet shall this gift a noble science be,
Had in esteem to all eternity.
Only by Heav'n was Poetry inspir'd.—
'Twas, is and shall for ever be admir'd.
On prophets and on kings 'twas first bestow'd,
And more or less in ev'ry age hath flow'd.
Yea, will be so till time itself shall end :
And then in heav'n eternally extend :
For all the hosts of Heav'n shall ever raise,
Sweet hymns of thanks to their Redeemer's praise

When God the top-stone of creation rear'd,
The heav'nly hosts his Name in hymns rever'd :
And how much more shall saints and angels sing,
The praises of their Saviour and their King ?
Therefore let none this heavenly gift despise,
Nor mimic it with vanity and lies.

The holy scriptures too (as we are told)
Were mostly pen'd in Poetry of old.
Yea, ev'n Acrostics too are written there*,
Altho' the ignorant are not aware :
And whether in blank verse or flowing rhyme,
It matters not, for both are still sublime.

But

* The cxixth Psalm is an alphabetical acrostic throughout, and also four chapters of Jeremiah's Lamentations.

But these to mimic in a carnal strain,
Is most audacious, foolish, and profane.

Let Poets all from hence of this beware,
Or they will sure be caught in Satan's snare.
Ye Poetafters, leave such vicious play,
Or you'll abhorred be of God and man.
Presume no farther; but your danger dread,
Or you'll despised be alive and dead.
You who are not with Poetry endu'd,
Why of false gifts should you grow vain and proud,
Altho' your vain companions, with applause,
Commend your strains, against all nature's laws,
When you engage in some forbidden cause.
To such false adulation lend none ear,
Or, to the brink of ruin you are near.
Then if you venture; ere you are aware,
You will be caught in the destroyer's snare;
From which you hardly will again get free,
'Thro' all the ages of eternity.
But if you will no friendly warning take,
Before you sink into th' infernal lake,
Then must you take your wretched fatal choice,
And still believe the grand deceiver's voice.
Short, short, will be your date of carnal joy,
But, ah! how long your anguish and annoy!
Yea, endless will be your unbounded woe,
If once into th' infernal gulph you go!

Tho' some can jingle out a foolish verse,
And then the same to fellow fools rehearse,
Who may commend it for a witty thing,
Which will to him both wealth and honour bring.
This prompts them on; they Poetry assume,
In hopes that wealth and honour thus will come:

But

But when their work to men of sense appears,
 All their reward is but contempt or sneers.
 Their characters at best are empty fools,
 Who nothing know of nature's noble rules.
 Tho' some of their own sort may praise the strain,
 And say it doth much wit and sense contain,
 Yet is their profit only just disdain. }

Examples here of many we have seen,
 More in the present age than e'er hath been*.
 Ayrshire especially, with such abound,
 Which to this science gives a deadly wound.
 Let this for after-times be on record,
 Ayrshire was once with Poetasters stor'd.
 They sprung up quick, like mushrooms in a night,
 And then like butterflies began their flight.
 But had not this been so corrupt an age,
 Scarce any would have bought or read one page
 Of such vile jargon; but with just disdain,
 Would not have deign'd to look thereon again.

Some of them smutty; some of them far worse,
 Which prove their authors void of all remorse—
 Making a mock of ev'ry sacred thing,
 And rankest treason too against the king.
 Yea, ev'n the grossest infidelity,
 And Atheism unto the last degree.
 Others insipid, void of common sense,
 Which cannot make a laugh or smile commence.

Such is the gen'ral character of those,
 Who doggral rhymes in Ayrshire now compose.

B

Yea,

* Lapraik and several others in Ayreshire.

Yea, some few more in other parts of late,
 Have learn'd of them like parrots now to prate.
 But in this age all true poetic fire,
 Seems almost at the present to expire.
 Never were less in all the days of yore,
 Yet Poetasters there were never more.
 Nor can we think this was so much abus'd,
 In any age since first it was infus'd.
 Grub-street had got that paltry name a-while,
 Chief seat for Poetasters in this isle :
 But Ayrshire now may make her rightful claim
 For Poetasters, she hath got the name.
 Let other parts take warning hence and see
 That from such infamy they keep them free.
 Let Ayrshire only bear the just disdain
 And let the rest the odium hence refrain.
 Let all men shun this pestilential air,
 Which now begins to spread itself elsewhere.
 If once it get a vent and spread around,
 It surely will our country all confound—
 'Tis grown a most contagious wild disease,
 And young and old it seems at once to seize.
 'Tis like a raging fever in the brain,
 And then it breaks forth in a frantic strain ;
 From which, pray God, all sober men defend,
 Before it bring them to a rueful end.

A

MEDITATION ON MAY,

O R,

THE BRIEF HISTORY OF A MODERN POET.

Owond'rous month, thou month of May,
 Now nature shews her beauties gay
 For wheresoe'er we turn our eyes,
 We meet with objects of surprize;
 The great Creator's skill and pow'r,
 Is seen in ev'ry op'ning flow'r!
 For ev'ry herb and pile of grafs,
 Infinite skill and pow'r exprefs.
 Behold, the lilies how they grow,
 What matchless colours here they show!
 Not Solomon in best array,
 Could such a glorious sight display!

Nor only flow'rs and herbs behold,
 Which colours exquisite unfold;
 But insects too of ev'ry kind,
 Astonish ev'ry thinking mind!
 Myriads of flies and crawling worms,
 E D I. Appear in most surprising forms!
 As also brutes of ev'ry size,
 Are teeming forth before our eyes.

Nor

Nor are these half the works of God,
 Which shew his matchless pow'r abroad ;
 But Man, his noblest work below,
 Still more his pow'r and wisdom show.
 In God's own image was he made,
 And over all on earth the head :
 Yea, over ev'ry earthly thing,
 Was he created sov'reign king.

Thus man at first was highly rais'd,
 But, ah, how soon was he debas'd !
 He quickly from his glory fell,
 And so became the heir of hell.
 Man was in Satan's net inclos'd,
 But Mercy kindly interpos'd :
 God saw our direful wretched case,
 And magnified his sov'reign grace.
 A Saviour freely undertakes,
 And perfect satisfaction makes,
 That whosoever him receiv'd,
 And in his holy name believ'd,
 Should be from condemnation free,
 Redeem'd from endless misery.
 Yet all men now are born in sin,
 And troubles with our lives begin.
 But wisdom infinite hath found,
 A cure for our immortal wound ;
 And by the Saviour's dying love,
 Made ev'n the curse a blessing prove.
 Tho' troubles must attend us here,
 Yet faithful souls have nought to fear :
 All who put trust in Christ the Lord,
 Shall be eternally restor'd.
 When they've thro' life like winter past,
 Salvation shall arrive at last.

In this same month, as I heard say,
 And on the ninth revolving day ;
 Unto my father's house there came,
 A stranger, but without a name,
 Roaring and helpless, in distress,
 Naked and bare, and pennyless.
 In vain would any ask his name,
 What came he for, or whence he came ;
 For he could give them no reply,
 But only gave a plaintive cry.

The people all that happen'd there,
 Did on this stranger look and stare :
 But not one knew him less or more,
 None there had seen his face before.

My mother she was-fore distressed,
 Ere she beheld this new come guest,
 Whom she had never seen before,
 He gave her pain and trouble sore.
 She took her bed, and there she lay
 In sore distress for many a day.
 Yet still the stranger she caress'd,
 And hugg'd him closely to her breast.
 For as he came in such a trim,
 What could she do but pity him ?
 For had she not of him ta'en care,
 When he so helpless was and bare ;
 Surely he must have quickly died,
 If some had not his wants supplied.
 But she some clothes had in the house,
 Prepar'd for some such needful use ;
 And these did she on him bestow,
 For he could neither stand nor go.
 My father too of him took care,
 And made him very welcome there ;

But

But finding he had got no names,
 Had him baptiz'd, and call'd him James.
 Nine months had he a traveller been,
 Yet none before his face had seen.

Now being cherish'd, warm'd, and drest,
 He thankfulness by smiles express'd.
 And thus was he preserv'd alive,
 And daily he began to thrive.

Thus having told the month and day,
 When hither first he bent his way.
 I likewise shall make known the year,
 In which he made his entrance here :
 In seventeen hundred and a score,
 He came, all with a plaintive roar.

Now at my father's house he stay'd,
 Near twenty years, then off he stray'd
 Far south of Tweed, an unknown road,
 Which he before had never trode.
 Much like the prodigal of old,
 Whereof we are in scripture told :
 Only some circumstances here,
 Will not a just resemblance bear :
 He had no fortune there to spend,
 But thought his knowledge to extend.
 Honest and just was his intent,
 When from my fathers house he went.
 Yet like the prodigal was he,
 Soon sunk in wretched poverty :
 And tainted with prevailing vice,
 When sinners did his mind entice :
 Yet soon did he his error see,
 And chang'd his course in some degree.

For ere he left my father's house,
 He thought the gospel plan to chuse.
 But when he wandered far abroad,
 He found scarce one that feared God ;
 For one whole year he scarce perceiv'd
 One whom he thought in Christ believ'd.
 For almost all were so profane,
 Taking the name of God in vain ;
 This damp't his spirit, and his zeal,
 That every grace began to fail.
 Yet where the seed of grace is sown,
 It cannot quite be overthrown.

Now did he heartily repent,
 That from my father's house he went,
 Yet tho' for this he long time mourn'd,
 While he in foreign lands sojourn'd,
 Yet found no opportunity,
 My father's house again to see,
 Till many years were past and gone,
 Father or mother there were none !
 Brothers and sister, all were dead,
 And but some offspring in their stead.

Now, ere this stranger went his way,
 One thing of him a secret lay,
 Not one e'er knew he was a poet,
 Till he began at last to show it.
 The seed lay bury'd under ground,
 Near twenty years ere fruit was found.
 Tho' long before his heart was set
 Thereon, yet vent could never get ;
 But after that the Muse began
 To spring, as he became a man :
 As he in age and knowledge grew,
 He poems wrote, and not a few ;

For

Which

Which by good judges were admir'd,
 And thus his Muse was much inspir'd.
 The book of Psalms he wholly penn'd,
 Which did no proper judge offend :
 But is allow'd to be the best
 That hath in English been express'd.
 But all things vicious and profane,
 Were objects still of his disdain.
 But nat'ral, moral, and divine,
 Were themes in which he wish'd to shine.
 Hence Gentry ; yea, and Noblemen,
 Have oftentimes employ'd his pen.
 Whose approbation still he gain'd,
 And favours oft from them obtain'd.
 To all who him a favour shew'd,
 He still express'd his gratitude,
 In chearful strains of thankfulness,
 And ever pray'd for their success.

If any treat'd him with spite,
 He could them handsomely requite,
 And point their folly forth so clear,
 As made them all his pen to fear.
 He set the glass before their eyes,
 Which shew'd their spots without disguise,
 Yet never with intention ill,
 But always out of pure good will.

He lov'd to eye God's providence,
 Whate'er he saw in time commence :
 And what he found upon record,
 Convey'd to men in his own word.
 He always lov'd a sober life,
 Abhorring brawls and noisy strife,
 Temp'rate and sober day and night—
 Quarrels he shunn'd, and scorn'd to fight.

To study he was much inclin'd,
 But nothing of a vicious kind.
 Tho' many hardships he came through,
 And many dreadful dangers too,
 With health he hath been richly blest'd,
 Tho' much by poverty oppress'd,
 Yea, he hath weather'd many a storm
 And still brought through with little harm.
 Death oftentimes to him appear'd,
 As midnight dark, ere morning clear'd.
 Thus weeping may endure a night,
 But God sends joy by morning light.
 Hereof he much experience had,
 Which cheer'd his heart when dull and sad.
 Why should he then despair or doubt,
 What Providence can bring about?
 Which hath so often clear'd his way,
 And turn'd his darkness into day!

Now of this stranger you have heard,
 In what condition he appear'd,
 And how he hath been exercis'd,
 Ever since he hath been baptiz'd.
 Tho' many things of lesser note,
 Must needs, of course, be now forgot.
 Yet still he lives, and still he writes,
 And much in Poetry delights *;
 So that his name is greatly known,
 And is despis'd almost by none.
 To study, tho' so much inclin'd,
 He never pleas'd the vicious mind,
 Nor aim'd to gratify their taste,
 Who turn'd religion to a jest.

* Written in August 1790.

C

And

And for the ignorant and rude,
 By them he's little understood;
 Altho' he writes exceeding plain,
 Fools always will good sense disdain:
 Like pearls when cast before the swine,
 However they with lustre shine,
 They trample them beneath their feet,
 As filthy dirt about the street:
 For nastiness is their desire,
 To roll and wallow in the mire.
 But such he never aims to please,
 Or flatter any such as these:
 But those of sense and judgment true,
 He strives to give each one his due.
 And thus he hopes his days to spend,
 Till he obtain a happy end.

U R A N I A ' S

A D V I C E T O P O E T S .

TO please the taste of all mankind,
 Is this the task by thee design'd?
 And if thou canst the same perform,
 Then must thou weather many a storm.
 Yea, must do what was never done,
 By any man beneath the sun.

The learned, judicious, and the wise,
 Will only sense and judgment prize.

Where

Where good ideas are exprest,
 Such, only such will stand the test :
 Where sense and reason fair appear,
 To warm the heart and charm the ear.

But by the ignorant and rude,
 Such things are never understood ;
 Nonsense alone will please them best,
 No matter how it be exprest.

The candid readers will sustain,
 What captious critics will disdain ;
 To shew their wit they censure all,
 That under their cognizance fall.

Some will approve of flowing rhyme,
 Where sense and numbers sweetly chime ;
 While some the sweetest rhimes despise,
 And blank verse only they will prize.

Others all kinds of verse refuse,
 An prose is only what they chuse ;
 Nor of the best thereof approve,
 The dullest best their fancies move.
 Yea, some to books of ev'ry kind,
 Shew great aversion in their mind ;
 Whose taste is all for earthly store,
 And carnal things ; they want no more.

While some the Bible only prize,
 And ev'ry other book despise ;
 Because they're by tradition taught,
 That it alone with truth is fraught :
 Yet when they take it in their hand,
 But little of it understand,

To

To them it is a sealed book
 Wherein they very seldom look.
 But if it have a gilt outside,
 Then will it much exalt their pride,
 To take it to the church. Why not?
 To shew what Bible they have got.

Yea, worse than these thou yet wilt find,
 If worse can be among mankind :
 Who yet in books take great delight,
 Ev'n such as carnal minds excite.
 Such books they love which most excel,
 In shewing them the way to hell.
 The most lascivious and profane,
 Or those of a deistic strain.
 Such as are found—in David Hume,
 Or Dugeon of a hellish gloom.
 Likewise the forenam'd Poet Burns,
 Who all reveal'd religion spurns.
 And Peter Pindar, who can fling
 His vile reproaches at the King.
 Or Bolingbroke, and others too,
 Who hellish wit profusely shew.
 With many more, in verse and prose,
 Who all the truths of Heav'n oppose.
 Such are the books now much in vogue,
 Esteem'd by ev'ry jilt and rogue.

Now if thou would'st for money write,
 Consider how to hit the white :
 Or if thou writ'st to get a name,
 Of endless obloquy or fame ;
 Think now which party thou can'st please,
 Among such votaries as these.

So please them all thou art unfit,
And so were all that ever writ.

Thus spake URANIA to the Bard,
Who all these words attentive heard.
Then he the boundless task resign'd,
Vain hope of pleasing all mankind—
Resolv'd if he could any please,
They should be only such as these,
The candid and judicious few,
Who still to merit give its due;
Yet are not of true judgment blind,
But soon a real fault can find;
And check an error, when they see't,
Without an air of captious wit.

Such readers he resolv'd to try,
If possible, to gratify:
But the voluptuous, and profane,
Who ev'ry serious truth disdain;
With all the stupid and the rude,
Who good call evil, evil good;
He would regard none of such sort,
Howe'er they at his works made sport.

And tho' he should not money gain,
Nor yet the world's applause obtain,
If he the plaudit of the Lord
Obtain'd, altho' by fool's abhorr'd,
Then would he well contented be,
Howe'er his readers disagree.
O happy Bard, who this obtains,
Tho' he nor wealth nor honour gains;
Tho' he small money should procure,
Tis no disgrace to say, He's poor.

For

For that's a common can't this day,
 The Poet's poor, they always say :
 But if that is the worst, no matter,
 To mankind less is he the debtor :
 And if on him they cast the blame,
 He can to them return the same.
 If he writes things of gen'ral use,
 He needs not fear their vile abuse.
 But if he writes of things profane,
 Or of a base, lascivious strain ;
 No matter though he suffer scorn,
 And sink in poverty forlorn.
 Such jargon it may please a while,
 And fools on him may fawn and smile,
 But soon on him they'll turn the tail,
 And let his expectations fail.
 The higher he at first aspire,
 The deeper shall he sink in mire ;
 And ev'n his readers, that him prais'd,
 By them he shall be most debas'd.
 Consider then, ye Poets all,
 Lest thus you meet a shameful fall ;
 For if on clouds you high ascend,
 You'll sink the lower at the end.

A H Y M N.

WHEN first the heav'n-born muse began
 Her sacred wing to try,
 She was the foremost in the van
 To praise the Lord most high.

Delightful

II.

Delightful in JEHOVAH's eye,
Her own almighty Sire ;
Employ'd his name to magnify,
Amidst the new-born choir.

III.

Thus like a nymph divinely bright
The muse at first did shine :
The soul she ravish'd with delight,
In raptures all divine.

IV.

But now, alas, with grief we see
This heav'n-born gift abus'd
By sons of lewd impiety,
And to base purpose us'd.

V.

They take of this celestial fire
To kindle hellish flames ;
And thus they please their loose desire,
With vile licentious themes.

VI.

These bold transgressors I beheld,
And was with grief oppress'd ;
To see how boldly they rebell'd.
And made God's word their jest.

VII.

Hence some of serious minds suppose
That this celestial art,
Was ne'er design for such as those,
Who are of pious heart.

VIII.

Thus doth the Muse still lose renown ;
Her worth is little priz'd ;
Between the critic and the clown,
She's shamefully despis'd.

Yet

IX.

Yet on her sweet, delightful wing,
She bears celestial lays ;
While saints adore their heavenly King,
Or angels sing his praise.

X.

Jesus ! thy wond'rous dying love,
Shall still employ his Muse,
While each redeemed soul above,
This matchless scene reviews !

XI.

Angels shall join their grateful strains,
To celebrate thy praise,
Who wond'ring saw thy bleeding veins,
With horror and amaze !

XII.

And thus through all eternity
The heav'n-born Muse shall sing,
Enrapt, with sweetest harmony,
To God, th' eternal King.

XIII.

The wonders of redeeming love,
Shall be her choicest theme :
This all the ransom'd souls above
Shall joyfully proclaim.

F I N I S.

